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Subject: Proposed FY 2005 Forest Health Project, Cuba Ranger District (cubard)

To: Forest Supervisor, Santa Fe National Forest

On October 6, Dave Conklin of our staff met with Andy Vigil (SFNF Westside silviculturist) to examine the Chaparral project area on the Cuba RD. The main objective of this site visit was to select some areas for treatment under our insect and disease prevention/suppression program in FY 2005. Selected stands and proposed treatments are described below, along with some additional observations and suggestions.

The Chaparral project area extends along the west side of Forest Road 539 from the Rancho del Chaparral Girl Scout Camp (north end) to Forest Road 534 (south end). This tract of mostly ponderosa pine forest is considered a wildland-urban interface (WUI) due to its proximity to the camp; moreover, prevailing winds move through the area to the camp. Several stands here have been selectively logged within the past year, and understory thinnings have been completed or are ongoing in some of these units.

**Areas Selected for FY 2005 Proposal.** We selected two areas outside these initial treatment units for inclusion in an FY 2005 project proposal. One (approximately 40 acres) is near the junction of FR 539 and 534; the other (roughly 100 acres) is about a mile north of the junction, between O'Neil units 2 and 4. Andy will determine the actual size and boundaries of these areas prior to submitting his proposal.

Both of these areas are predominantly ponderosa pine, with minor amounts of Douglas-fir in the understories. Two main size/age classes are present: 70 to 80 year old poles and small sawtimber (the majority of the trees), and an older (100+ year old) cohort of somewhat larger timber. Densities exceed 600 trees per acre in most areas. Because of these high densities, relatively few younger trees are present. The last entry was 25-30 years ago, when thinnings to 5-6 foot spacing were accomplished. (Prior to that, densities easily exceeded 2000 trees/acre.) Site quality is good, with estimated site indices of 75 to 80.

No dwarf mistletoe infection was observed in these stands; in general, incidence of this disease appears to be quite low in this portion of the Jemez Mountains. Except for overcrowding, the stands appear quite healthy and contain an abundance of good "crop trees." The project would be proposed and implemented as a bark beetle prevention project. Bark beetle "risk" is high under present stand conditions, especially during extended dry periods.

We agreed to thin these stand to an average 18- 20 foot spacing, favoring the better dominant and codominant stems. Spacing would vary (up to 50%) to allow retention of the best trees and provide a more irregular stand structure. This treatment would retain 100 to 150 trees per acre and basal areas of 50 to 80 square feet per acre. This prescription would retain somewhat higher



densities than the standard “fuels reduction” prescription applied elsewhere in the Chaparral project area, but would sacrifice fewer quality trees.

We recommend implementing the thinning between mid-July and mid-December to reduce the potential for a build-up of *Ips* engraver beetles in the thinning slash. Alternately, the fresh slash could be chipped or masticated to eliminate the breeding material and reduce fire hazard.

**Additional Observations and Suggestions.** The standard “fuels reduction” prescriptions being implemented in the recent/ongoing treatment areas retain 40 to 60 BA of larger trees and eliminate most trees in the smaller size classes. From a silvicultural perspective, we think it may have been preferable to mark/retain more trees in the smaller size classes in several of the stands we visited. One situation bears special note; our suggestion here may have application for planning and layout of future treatment areas:

In the Beta unit (machine masticated), we observed an extremely dense, two acre group of stagnant pole-timber where no trees had been marked for retention. The contractor had slashed about half this group but then stopped (perhaps wisely). Because of the extremely high cost (and low overall benefit) of treating acres in this condition, we suggest that *deferral* from mechanical treatment may be a reasonable option. In planning and layout of future treatment areas, we suggest that retention of occasional dense, stagnant groups like this will not significantly affect fire behavior across the landscape.

Please contact us if you have questions about this evaluation or need additional assistance developing a project proposal.

/s/ David A. Conklin (for)  
DEBRA ALLEN-REID  
New Mexico Zone Leader, Forest Health

cc: Leonard Lucero, John Anhold, Andy Vigil, Regis Cassidy, Steve F Romero